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AUTHOR Bluemel, Nancy Larson; Taylor, Rhonda Harris
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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was sent to 1,000 randomly selected public school librarians in October 1990 to determine how school library media centers fit into the program of intervention for at-risk students mandated by Texas legislation. Usable responses were received from 528 librarians, of whom only 32% reported being actively involved in their district or schools' at-risk programs. However, 77.7% of the respondents were aware of an at-risk coordinator in their district. Plans to request library materials geared to at-risk students were reported by 61% of the respondents. The most frequently listed material by a wide margin was high interest/low vocabulary books, followed by audiovisual materials; more than one third of the AV materials listed by respondents were computer related. The third and fourth most frequently mentioned materials (by 14.6%) were media related to societal issues that directly affect teenagers and drugs, vocational/career information, English as a Second Language, and self-esteem. Only 18% of the respondents reported unique services for at-risk students in their library media centers. Five categories which seemed to be the most common were: (1) librarians participating in school-wide support programs; (2) reading incentive programs; (3) computer/technology usage; (4) student peer programs; and (5) parental involvement. It was concluded that, while some librarians are providing exemplary service and support for the at-risk student, there is a need within the profession for more information and involvement. This report concludes with a summary of some of the reasons why more library media specialists are not involved in at-risk programs and four recommendations to the Texas Library Association Research and Scholarship Committee. Two appendices contain the questionnaire and analyses of the responses for individual questions presented in 11 figures. (BBM)

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Current Status of Texas Library Media Specialists' Intervention with At-Risk Students

by

Nancy Larson Bluemel and Rhonda Harris Taylor

Presented as a Contributed Paper to
Texas Library Association Annual Conference
April 11, 1991.

This Study Funded by a Grant from the
Texas Library Association Scholarship and Research Committee.

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Current Status of Texas Library Media Specialists'
Intervention with At-Risk Students

For the past two years, Texas legislation has mandated intervention for at-risk students at the district level. As librarians with an interest in at-risk programs, we asked ourselves: Where does the library media center fit into this state-wide program of intervention? To answer this question, we submitted a proposal, and were funded this past year, for a Texas Library Association Research and Scholarship grant. We wanted to know:

1) Are library media specialists aware of the situation of at-risk students in general and in their districts specifically?

2) Are library media specialists involved in their districts' at-risk programs, and if so, how are they involved?

3) Are library media specialists providing, on their own, efforts to aid at-risk students through library media center programs/services, and if so, what are those programs/services?

In October of 1990, we surveyed, at random, 1,000 Texas Association of School Librarians members out of the current membership at that time. After eliminating students, retired librarians, librarians in private schools, district coordinators, educators, vendors, etc., we had a population of public school librarians, from which our l,000 were selected. We received 560 responses, but were able to use only 528 after eliminating those received from retired librarians, those who had left the profession, or those who had changed jobs to non-public school positions.

Our survey instrument, which was pretested, is reproduced in Appendix A. The questionnaire had 12 questions, 2 l/2 pages, with a l/2 page for respondents to request more information and/or survey results.

Who were our respondents? Here's a quick profile:

- grade levels - 1/2 of them were in schools that we arbitrarily defined as "elementary" - that is grades pre-k through 6 (Appendix B, Figure 1)

- number of students in district - 1/3 of them were in school districts with 10,001 to 49,999 students and l/3 of them were in schools with populations of 1,001 to 5,000 (Appendix B, Figure 2)

- region service centers represented - all service center regions were represented, with 17.6 % from region 4, representing the largest block

- when asked if they held their current position last year - 95% of them had their current position last year (Appendix B, Figure 3)

- years of work experience - 41% had 14 or more years of experience (Appendix B, Figure 4)

- book volumes - 51.98% worked with library collections size 5,001 to 10,000 volumes (Appendix B, Figure 5)

Are our respondents actively involved in their districts' or schools' at-risk programs? Appendix B, Figure 6 shows that 32 % answered yes, 42.94 % answered no, and 24.95 % of our respondents indicated they were not sure if they would be involved for the 1990-91 school year. This means over 65% of respondents were either not involved in their schools' or districts' at-risk programs, or did not know if they would be involved.

Were respondents cognizant of the presence of at-risk coordinators in their district and/or on their campuses? Appendix B, Figure 7 illustrates that 77.7% of the respondents knew there was a coordinator in their district.

When asked if they knew if there was an at-risk coordinator assigned to campus, the respondents replied: (Appendix B, Figure 8) 71% knew there was a person responsible for at-risk programs on-site at their campus.

However, 19 % did not know if there was a district coordinator and 18% did not know if there was someone on-site at their campus. The 70% figure representing those cognizant of the presence of a coordinator also contrasts with the 1/3 who knew that they would be involved with their school's at-risk programs.

One of the questions on the survey represented an attempt to determine what types of materials were being purchased for use with at-risk students. The question read : "For this

school year, 1990-91, do you plan to request library materials geared to at-risk students?" (Appendix B, Figure 9) 61% of those completing the survey answered "yes" to this question. No examples of types of materials were given in the question, so the responses provided insight into what is perceived as being beneficial for use in at-risk programs and/or with individual at-risk students.

The materials listed, when analyzed, fell logically into eight different categories. Some respondents did not list any materials; other listed several; so, the best way to evaluate the answers was simply to tabulate each item and demonstrate frequency with a bar graph (Appendix B, Figure 10).

The most frequently listed library material, by an overwhelming margin of almost three to one, was high interest/low vocabulary books. They were followed in frequency by audio-visual materials. We felt that the responses implied that librarians primarily define at-risk status in terms of reading ability. The majority of items listed in the AV category (more than a third) were computer-related, such as tutorials, CD-ROM programs, and computer games. We liked this trend since there is currently a large body of research which indicates a positive relationship between use of technology and student success. Other frequently listed AV items included videos (second in frequency to computer programs), book/cassette sets, books on tape, and manipulatives. Librarians who listed topics for their choice of AV generally cited curriculum-related subjects, societal topics, drugs, self-esteem, and motivational programs, including popular movies, such as "Stand and Deliver."

The third most frequently mentioned type of material purchased for use with at-risk students was media related to what we have termed "coping." This includes the societal issues which so affect teens, such as peer pressure, non-traditional families, divorce, physical abuse, sexual abuse, suicide, AIDS, etc. These outside influences are important contributions to being at-risk, yet only 14.6% of those who responded to this question included "coping" materials in their brief description of materials.

The next four categories of materials (drugs, vocational/career, ESL, and self-esteem) were listed with approximately the same frequency. "Drugs" was separated from "coping"

even though it is a societal issue because we were interested in how much of the large amount of money now available to schools for drug abuse prevention programs is being utilized in libraries. A response of 7.5% elicits these questions for us: Are librarians aware that money is available?; Who is responsible for its expenditure: coordinator, counselor, teacher?; What is the librarian's role in working within this program to provide resources? Similar questions can be asked regarding expenditures for the next four categories: Vocational/career, ESL, self-esteem, and study skills, which could be included in funding available for at-risk programs and Chapter 2 funds.

Many other materials were listed in response to the survey question, but not with enough frequency to be categorized on a graph. They do, however, provide some additional insight into what librarians perceive as materials needed by at-risk students. Here is a list of the most frequent responses:

- professional materials for teachers
- magazines and newspapers
- paperbacks
- large print books
- self-help books
- books dealing with values

We found some of the responses regarding library materials very interesting. For example, all librarians order audio-visual materials (or at least, we hope they do). However, 17% of the respondents said they were ordering no materials for at-risk students, and 22% did not know if they would order such materials. The majority of those who answered "yes" did not include AV materials in their brief description of items to be purchased. Many AV materials that are ordered for a library media center are suitable for use with the at-risk student. We wondered if the responses indicated a misconception of who is at-risk or a lack of awareness of how traditional library resources already in the library media center collection fit into at-risk programs.

The effort to identify unique services and/or programs for the at-risk students in Texas school library media centers also called for a brief description of those services if the question

was answered "yes." (Appendix B, Figure 11) Only 18% of the respondents answered in the affirmative and many of those did not elaborate on their programs. There was not enough frequency of any one type of program to justify a bar graph, as we used with responses with materials. Nevertheless, it was possible to identify five categories of programs/services which appeared to be the most common. The five categories were: 1) librarians participating in school-wide support programs, i.e. LIFT and BUDDY programs; 2) reading incentive programs; 3) computer/technology usage; 4) student peer programs; 5) parental involvement programs.

In addition, there were several "one-of-a-kind" or less frequently cited categories, which appeared to us to indeed be "unique" services for the at-risk:

- adopt-a-kid
- teen media center (special) area with materials on drugs, study skills, teen pregnancy, etc.
- PTA provides a book of child's choice for those who could not otherwise get one at the Book Fair
- develop special lessons for advanced students
- librarian learned to speak Spanish

When the descriptive answers to the question on services were analyzed, of 18% who responded "yes" to this question, an even smaller percentage were actually providing unique services/programs for their at-risk student populations. Comments included in that 18% ranged from, "Our programs are for everyone and everyone succeeds." to "If asked, we will." While there are obviously school librarians who are actively involved in exciting, positive, and unique services, it appears to us from this survey that as a profession, many of us are not clear about our role in our schools' programs for the at-risk, and we are unsure about how to approach this issue within the library media center setting.

Due to time constraints, we will not discuss the question on our instrument which asked if the library had student helpers/aides/assistants considered to be at-risk.

The questionnaire for this survey concluded with an opportunity for respondents to note any additional suggestions/comments about library media centers and at-risk programs which had not been brought out by the survey. There were numerous requests (289) for more

information on how to help at-risk students, for reading lists, and for examples of unique services. Some respondents offered details on programs offered, and those were included in our section on unique services. Many additional positive comments were made:

- "Our school committee for at-risk students meets in the library. I have been a standing and active member, because I am the only professional who sees all the kids regularly. I also can follow their school career from year to year. This overview can be valuable to the counselor and committee."

- "I think most of us are serving at-risk students - providing a "safe" haven and information at their ability level."

- "The library media center should be a working partnership with at-risk programs in every school and should provide input in the program."

- "I'm always curious as to why the state doesn't begin such programs in the media center."

There was also an unexpected response to the call for comments. For some respondents, it was an opportunity to speak on problems which, if not addressed, could have a deep impact on all of the library services schools provide. Let me share some of those comments with you:

- "I'll do what and when I'm asked. As the single employee in the library with approximately 950 students and circulation and lessons to do alone, I'm already overwhelmed and do not plan to initiate any extra work. This questionnaire came at the end of a 55 hour week, including a 9-6 Saturday to catch up. Sorry, but I do not feel 'positive' tonight."

- "At present I am carrying approximately the same class load as a classroom teacher and I must run the library in addition to my classes. I have no help; therefore, I do not think I could take on any more responsibilities."

- "Media specialists are neglected by TEA and local districts, yet they must know what's going on so they can coordinate materials with curriculum and programs."

- " Let's not get all fired up about serving a new population unless there is mandated library materials funding and while we're at it, let's get mandated funding about full-time adult library aides."

The descriptive statistics and the comments from this survey have provided us with an overview of how school library media centers currently fit into the state's at-risk program, and have enabled us to draw some conclusions about what we feel needs to be done in the future. While there are some librarians who are providing exemplary service and support for the at-

risk student, there is a need within the profession for more information and involvement. In general:

- There are many misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding the at-risk student that need to be addressed. As a whole, we tend to define that at-risk student as one doing poorly academically, which in turn defines how we respond to that perceived population.

- As a profession, we are not sure what our role is in at-risk programs, or if we have, or ought to have, a role.

- If we accept the premise that as school librarians we have a responsibility to be involved, we don't know what strategies and/or materials to use.

- We assume everything requires more funding, and often don't see the possibilities of using resources we already have, or of personal intervention on a one-to-one basis.

-There is a significant segment of the school library profession, judging from our respondents, who are suffering from poor morale. They are over-burdened, and perceive the at-risk student as "another program." They are not willing, and indeed are unable, to address this challenge until other, basic needs are met, such as clerical help and adequate budgets.

Therefore, among our recommendations going to the TLA Research and Scholarship Committee will be:

- In order to develop specialized library activities, librarians must understand the needs of at-risk students. Continuing education programs should be developed specifically for school librarians which:

1) help librarians understand who is "at-risk" and why, including the concept of multiple factors interacting to create "at-riskness" and of the state of "at-riskness" being best represented on a continuum, not on an either/or basis;

2) help librarians develop strategies for working with at-risk students in the library media center;

3) help librarians locate resources for the at-risk student, as well as for those working with the at-risk students;

4) help librarians locate and solicit funding for at-risk programs/resources. Such programs could be in the form of in-service at the district level, TLA programs at the district or state level, or other workshop settings. Also, information needs to appear in publications read by librarians.

-School library media centers currently implementing services and/or programs should be publicized.

-Information geared to school librarians should be made available through at-risk

coordinators, counselors, and administrators through the Texas Education Agency (TEA). This information should emphasize support available to school librarians to help them address needs of at-risk students through library media center resources and programs.

-Every effort must be made to see that TEA accreditation standards are being upheld, and that adequate financial support is provided to school library media centers so that school librarians can work in full partnership with teachers and counselors in the best interests of the student. This leadership role could be provided by professional teacher and library organizations.

We want to conclude with a thank-you for the hundreds of school librarians who took time from their very busy lives to respond to our questionnaire. It is our hope that the results of the survey might be utilized in ways which will repay their interest.

Appendix A

Survey Instrument

October 15, 1990

Dear Texas Association of School Librarians (TASL) Member:

The Texas Library Association's (TLA) Scholarship and Research Committee is sponsoring a grant to conduct this study, which will help to profile the involvement of public school library media specialists in their school districts' at-risk programs. Also, the study is to describe independent endeavors by school library media specialists to intervene with at-risk programs through library media center programs/services.

The at-risk student has become a major focus of Texas's educational resources. By the fall of 1988, Texas law mandated public schools to have support programs to provide intervention for at-risk students, as currently defined by the Texas Education Agency:

> At-risk...indicates whether a student is currently identified as at risk of dropping out of school ... . At-risk criteria differ between grade levels as indicated:
> Grades 1-6: ...at-risk if the student was retained (not promoted) in a grade level at least once in grades 1-6.
> Grades PK-6: ...at-risk if the student: 1) did not perform satisfactorily on a beginning-of-school-year readiness or achievement test; 2) failed at least one reading, writing, or math section of the most recent 3rd through 5th grade TEAMS/TAAS; 3) is a student of limited English proficiency (LEP); 4) has been a victim of abuse, as confirmed by the Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS); OR 5) engages in delinquent conduct as described by the Texas Family Code 51.03 (a).
> Grades 7-12: ...at-risk if the student: 1) was retained (not promoted) at least once in grades 1-6 and is still unable to master the essential elements in the 7th grade or higher; 2) is at least two years below grade level in reading or math; 3) failed at least two courses and is not expected to graduate within four years of 9th grade entrance, OR 4) failed at least one reading, writing, or math section of the most recent 7th through 12th grade TEAMS/TAAS.
> All Grades (PK-12): Each homeless student and each nonhandicapped student who resides in a residential placement facility outside the district of parent/guardian residence is identified as at-risk.
> In addition, environmental, familial, economic, social, developmental and other psycho-social factors may be considered.

This survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. While it is a confidential survey, the instrument has been coded to allow us to determine who has returned it, so that a follow-up postcard can be sent, if necessary. You have the option of indicating on the survey if you are willing to be contacted for more information. Also, if you wish to receive a summary of the results, just check the appropriate blank on the survey form.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope is included. Since we must prepare a report for the TLA Scholarship and Research Committee, we ask that you mail your response by **October 31, 1990**.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Bluemel
Library Coordinator
Sherman ISD
P. O. Box 1156
Sherman, TX 75090

Rhonda Harris Taylor
Director
Henderson Library
Lon Morris College
Jacksonville, TX 75766

Library Media Centers and At-Risk Students

General instructions:

The term " library" will mean "library media center."
Please place a checkmark in the blank indicating your response.
Some questions request a brief description.

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY BY: **October 31, l990.**
(self-addressed, stamped envelope supplied)

RETURN COMPLETED SURVEY AND DIRECT QUESTIONS TO:

Rhonda Harris Taylor
707 West Tyler Street
Bullard, TX 75757
(214) 586-247l ext. l52 FAX (2l4) 586-1194

---

l. What grade levels of students are taught on your **campus**? (check as many as needed)

a. pre-kindergarten (pre-k) ____
b. kindergarten ____
c. grade l ____

d. grade 2 ____
e. grade 3 ____
f. grade 4 ____

g. grade 5 ____
h. grade 6 ____
i. grade 7 ____

j. grade 8 ____
k. grade 9 ____
l. grade l0 ____

m. grade ll ____
n. grade l2 ____
o. special education ____
p. ungraded ____
q. other ____
Please specify:_____

2. Approximately how large is your school **district**? _____ students

3. What is your school **district's** regional education service center number (as Region I, II, III, etc.)? Regional Service Center Number ____

4. Did you hold your **current** position last year?

a. yes ____
b. no ____

Library Media Centers and At-Risk Students, page 2

5. How many **total** years of work experience do you have in libraries (count a school year as one full year)?
   a. first year librarian ____
   b. 1-3 years of experience ____
   c. 4-6 years of experience ____
   d. 7-9 years of experience ____
   e. 10-13 years of experience ____
   f. 14 or more years of experience ____

6. Approximately how many **book volumes** are in your library? _____

7. During this school year, 1990-91, will you be actively involved in the at-risk program for your **district or school**?
   a. yes ____
   b. no ____
   c. unknown ____

8. For this school year, 1990-91, do you plan to request **library materials** geared to at-risk students?
   a. yes ____
   b. no ____
   c. unknown ____

   If yes, please describe these materials briefly:

9. For this school year, 1990-91, are any of the **library's student helpers/aides/assistants** (include those students used for a single class period) considered to be at-risk?
   a. yes ____
   b. no ____
   c. unknown ____

10. For this school year, 1990-91, will your library offer any **unique services** and/or sponsor any **special programs** for at-risk students?
    a. yes ____
    b. no ____
    c. unknown ____

    If yes, please describe these services and/or programs briefly:

11. Is there a person in your school **district** who has been assigned to coordinate at-risk programs?
    a. yes ____
    b. no ____
    c. unknown ____

12. Is there a person on-site on your **campus** who is responsible for coordinating at-risk programs?
    a. yes ____
    b. no ____
    c. unknown ____

13. Please note here any additional suggestions/comments that you wish to make about **library media centers and at-risk programs** which have not been brought out by this survey (use the back if necessary).

****

14. Check here if you want to receive a summary of the results from this survey. ____

15. Check here if you are willing to be contacted for further details about your library and at-risk programs. ____

16. **If** you checked numbers l5 **and/or** l6 (above), please fill in:

    Name:_____

    Position:_____

    School:_____

    School mailing address (including zip code):_____

    _____

    Daytime phone number (including area code) if you are willing to be contacted by phone:

    (____) _____

#_____

Appendix B

Figures 1 - 11

Figure 1

Question 1: What grade levels of students are taught on your campus?

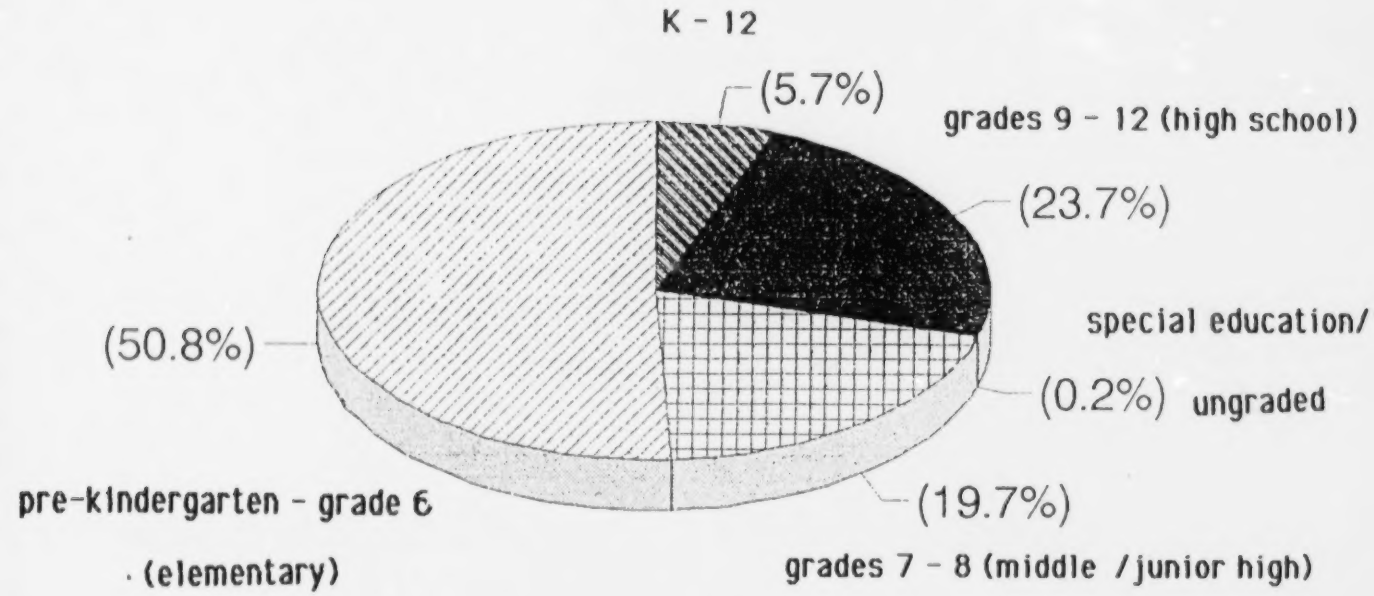

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Figure 2

Question 2: Approximately how large is your school district?

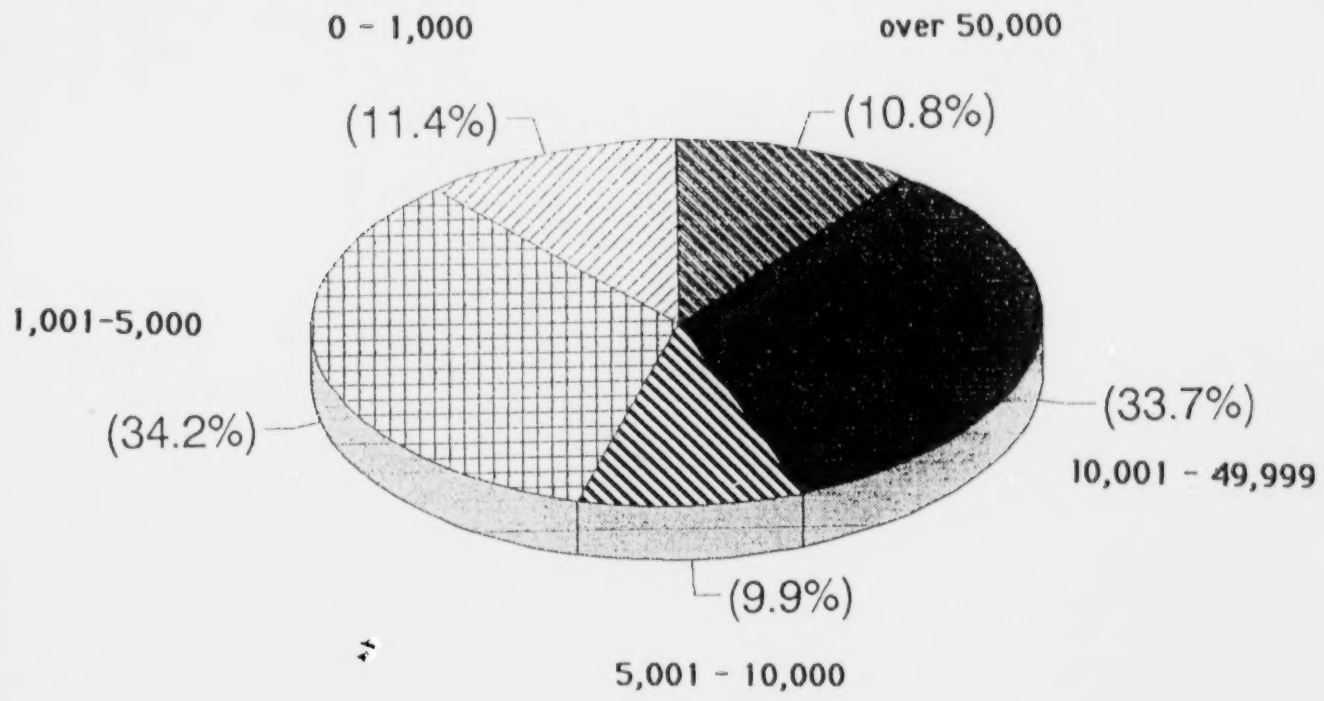

Figure 3

Question 4: Did you hold your current position last year?

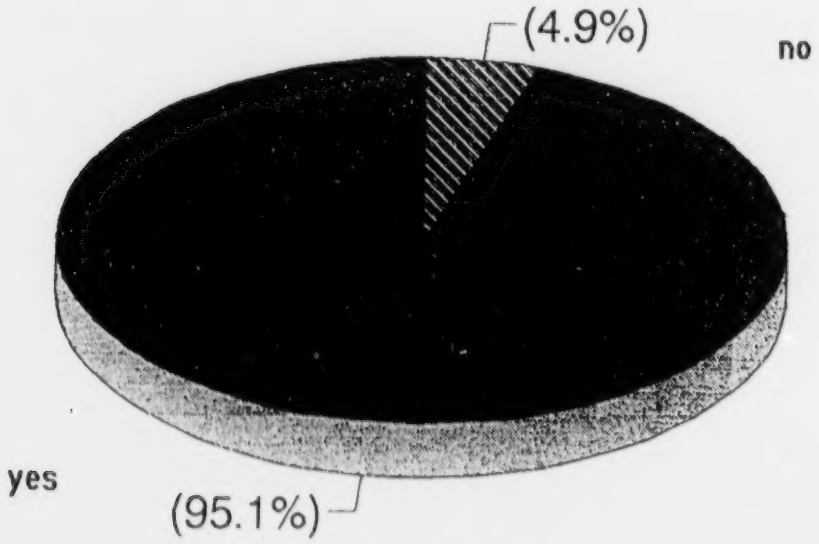

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Figure 4

Question 5: How many total years of work experience do you have in libraries (count a school year as one full year)?

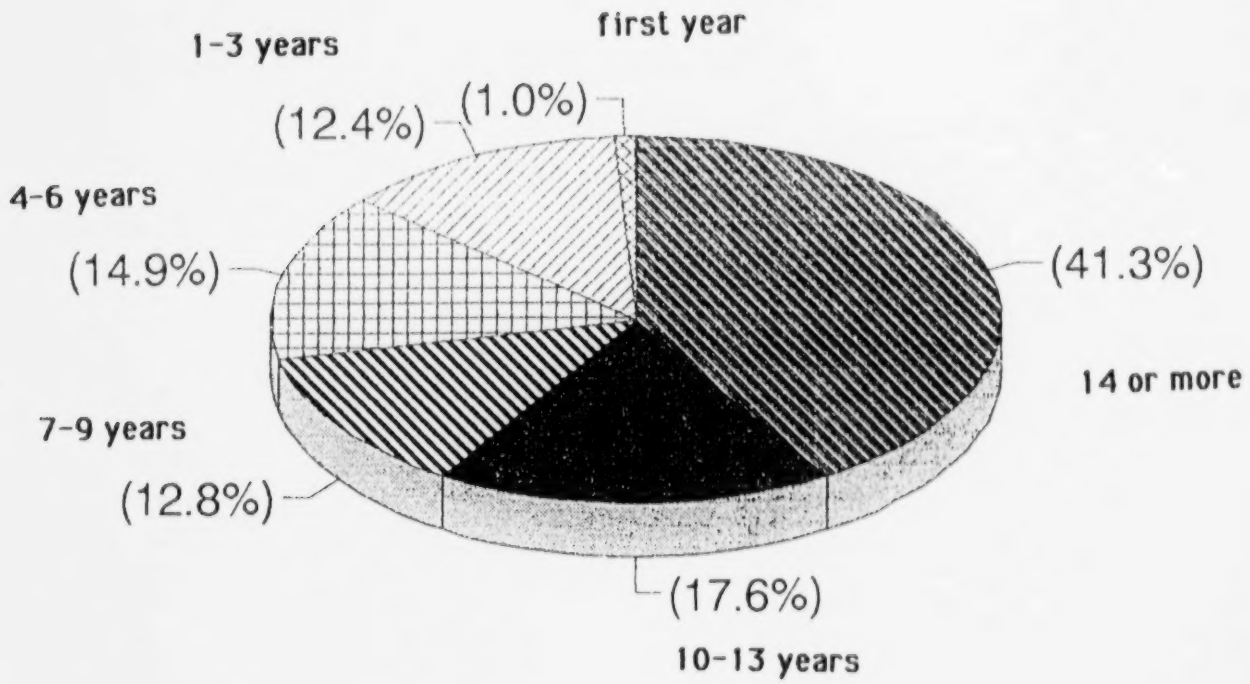

Figure 5

Question 6: Approximately how many book volumes are in your library?

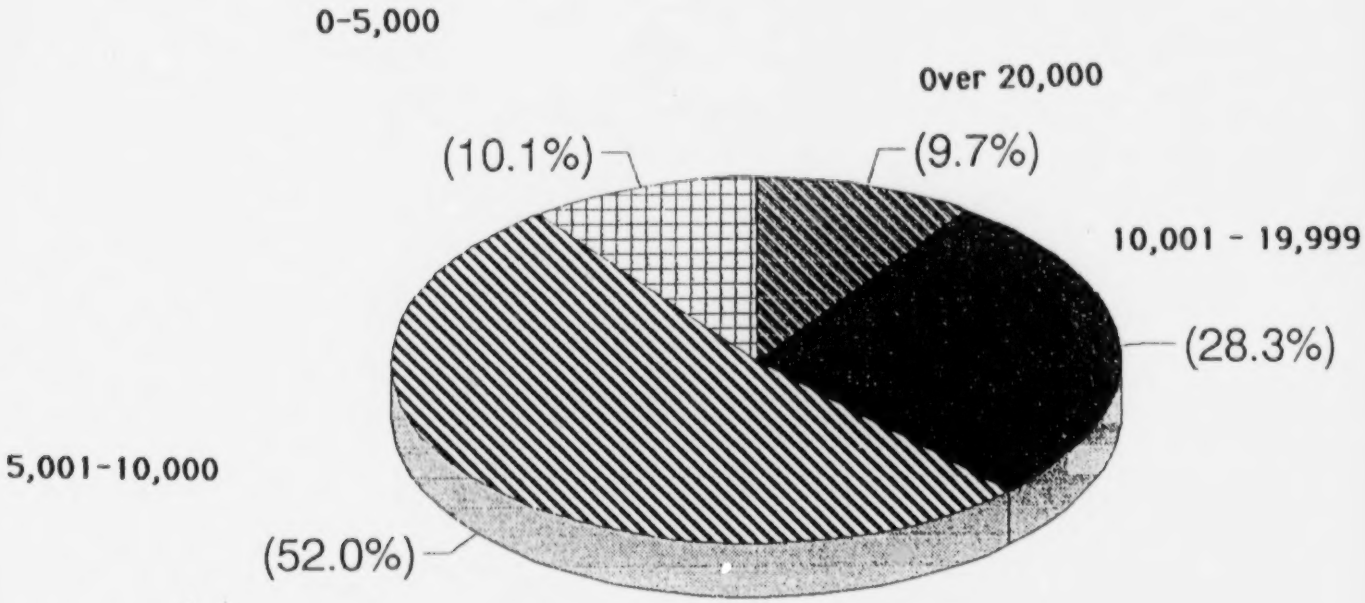

Figure 6

Question 7: During this school year, 1990-91, will you be actively involved in the at-risk program for your district or school?

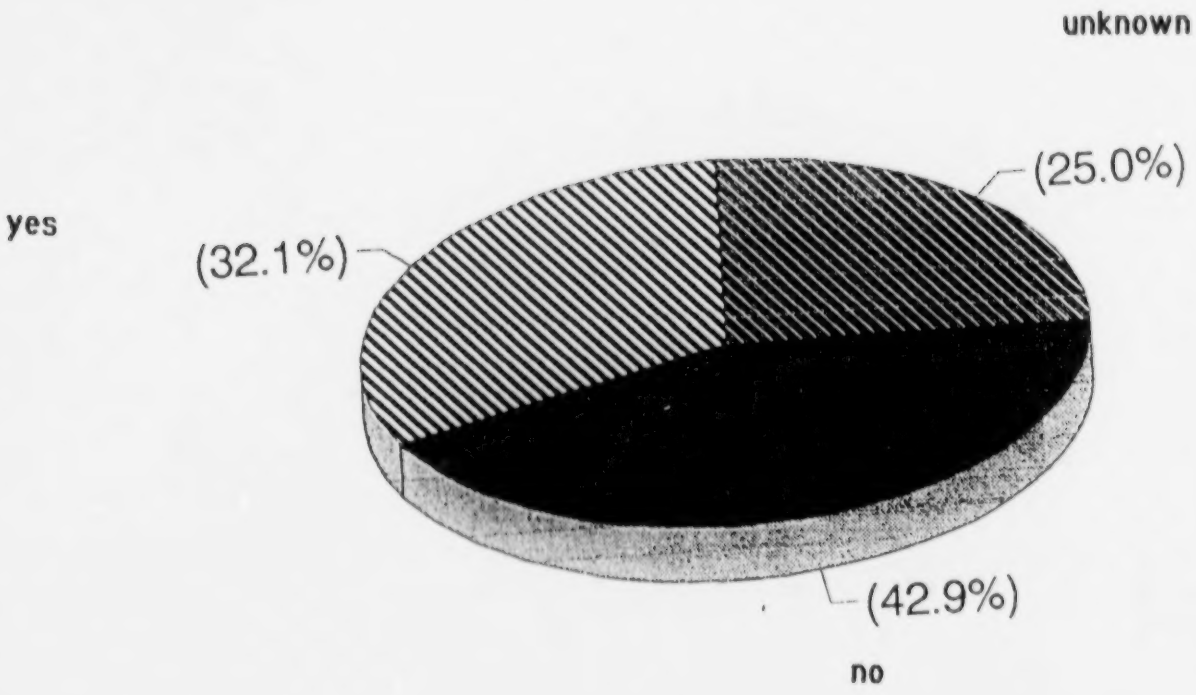

Figure 7

Question 11: Is there a person in your school district who has been assigned to coordinate at-risk programs?

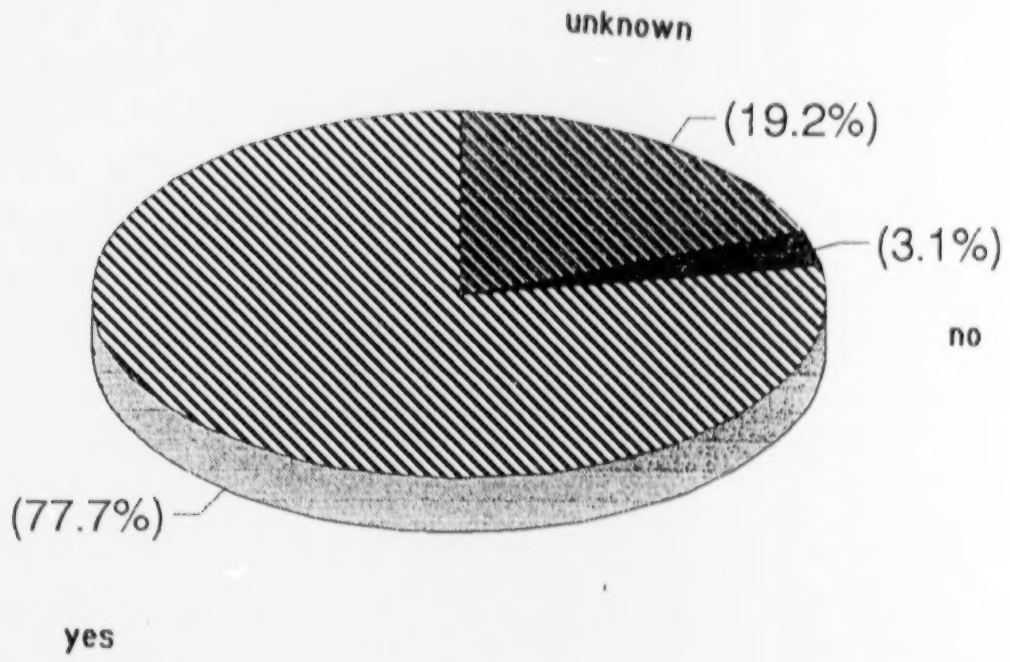

Figure 8

Question 12: Is there a person on-site on your campus who is responsible for coordinating at-risk programs?

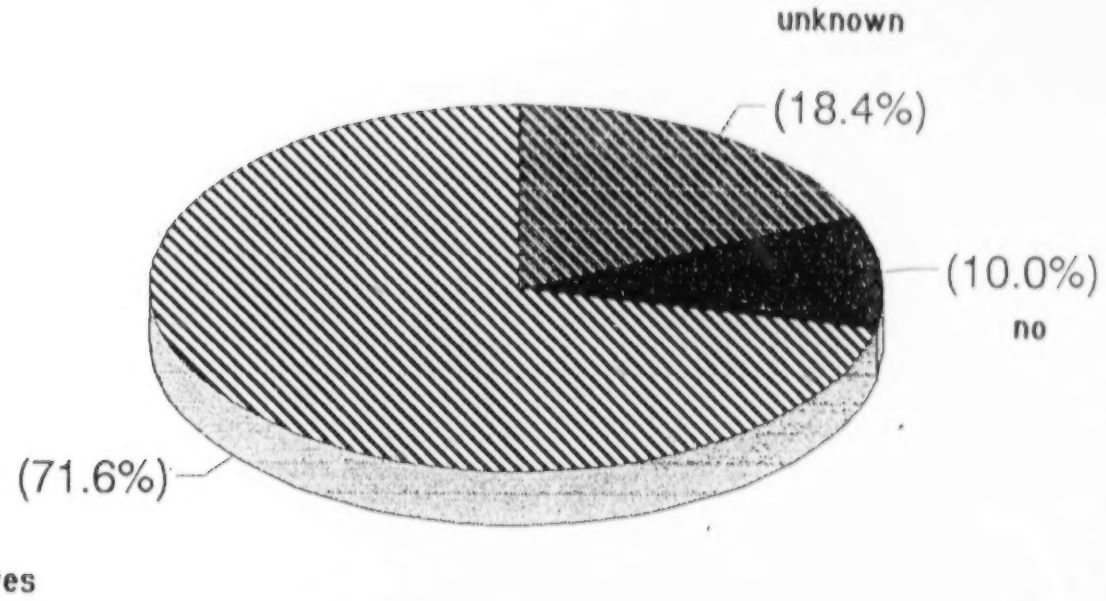

Figure 9

Question 12: For this school year, 1990-91, do you plan to request library materials geared to at-risk students?

If yes, please describe these materials briefly:

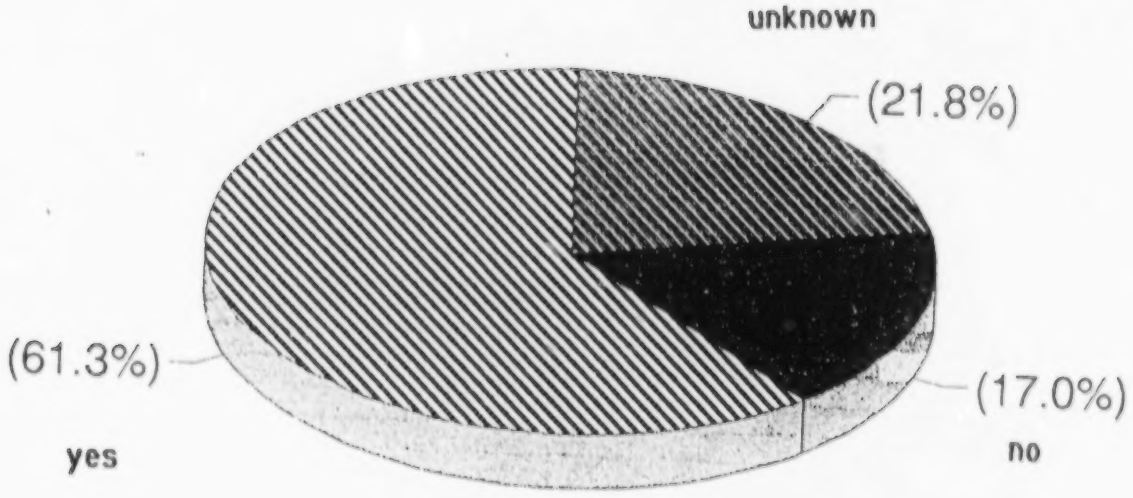

Figure 10

Question 8: For this school year, 1990-91, do you plan to request library materials geared to at-risk students?

If yes, please describe these materials briefly:

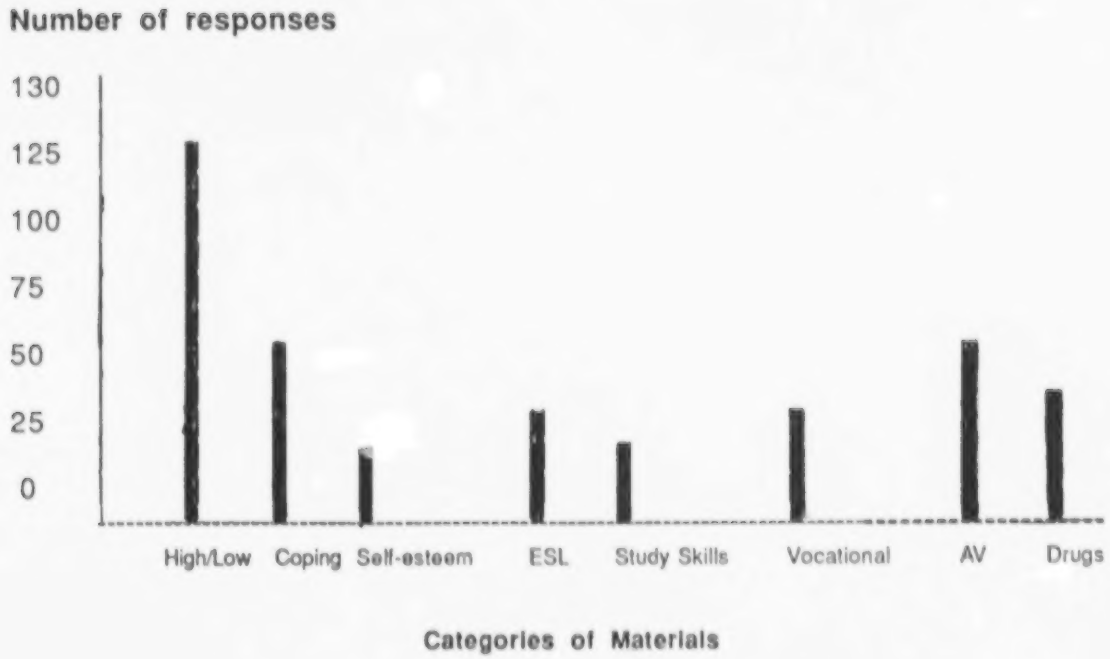

Figure 11

Question 10: For this school year, 1990-91, will your library offer any unique services and/or sponsor any special programs for at-risk students?

If yes, please describe these services and/or programs briefly: